

## Springfield Receives \$250K in Brownfields Assessment Grants

The Town of Springfield has been awarded a \$250,000 Brownfields assessment grant for various projects within the town. Of the total, \$200,000 will be used to conduct environmental site assessments and develop cleanup plans. The remaining \$50,000 is specifically for petroleum assessments and cleanup. Brownfields site have been identified at two former industrial sites on Clinton Street: the former Jones and Lamson Plant One, and the former Bryant Grinder plant. Both are being re-developed by the Springfield Regional Development Corporation.

Senator Patrick Leahy (D-Vt.), Senator Bernie Sanders (I-Vt.) and Representative Peter Welch (D-Vt.) announced last Wednesday that four Vermont organizations will share a total of \$1.35 million in Brownfields Program assessment and cleanup grants from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. Brownfields grants allow communities to clean up contaminated properties,

facilitating their redevelopment and reuse and improving local economies.

In a joint statement, Leahy, Sanders and Welch said: "These sizeable grants are the latest Brownfields grants to improve Vermont communities and local economies. All across the state, there are properties that are vacant and abandoned because of past contamination. These funds will help assess the extent of the contamination, as a first step towards cleaning them up and making them productive again. We will continue to work hard to ensure that the Brownfields program remains strong in Vermont and nationally, despite the current administration's proposal to reduce funding."

Leahy, Vice Chairman of the Senate Appropriations Committee, was able to ensure that the final Omnibus Appropriations Act, signed into law last month, included \$80 million for Brownfields grants, an \$11 million increase over the President's request. Sanders has

authorization oversight of the Brownfields program as a member of the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee, which recently voted to extend the program till 2023 and make it easier for local governments and nonprofits to more quickly clean up contaminated sites. Welch has authorization oversight of the Brownfields program as a member of the House Energy and Commerce Committee.



## Business as usual

**I**t's one of the worst-kept secrets in Washington that members of Congress are on the take.

So Democrats should spare Americans the faux outrage at the comments made last week by Mick Mulvaney, President Trump's director of the Office of Management and Budget, in speaking to a convention of bankers.

Not that everybody shouldn't be outraged by Mulvaney's remarks, whose remarkable bit of truth-telling gets at the core of how our country has devolved from a once-proud republic that stood for righteous things to a cheap imitation where everything is for sale.

That includes Congress, as Mulvaney pointed out when he told the American Bankers Association: "We had a hierarchy in my office in Congress. If you're a lobbyist who never gave us money, I didn't talk to you. If you're a lobbyist who gave us money, I might talk to you."

If that sounds illegal, maybe it ought to be, but that's business as usual in Washington. Members of Congress — Republicans and Democrats — have their palms out waiting to be greased by corporations and organizations with business before lawmakers. That money buys access.

Another example of business as usual is when one side feigns outrage over the other side's transgression to score political points.

Mulvaney told the truth, which set the stage for Sen. Bernie Sanders and some of his Democratic friends in the Senate to pounce.

They sent out a letter Tuesday to the Office of the Special Counsel, claiming Mulvaney's remarks "reinforce the American public's worst fears about a corrupt Washington establishment that sells access and is rigged for special interests with teams of lobbyists and deep pockets." They asked for an investigation.

We don't begrudge Sanders and his friends their indignation at Mulvaney so much as we resent the implication that they're not, as Michael Corleone said in the film "Godfather II," "part of the same hypocrisy."

The letter was signed by Sen. Sherrod Brown, D-Ohio (who has taken \$10.95 million in PAC money during his career), Sen. Jeff Merkley, D-Ore., (\$3.03 million), Sen. Dianne Feinstein, D-Calif., (\$9.715 million), Sen. Ron Wyden, D-Ore., (\$10.03 million), and

Sen. Catherine Cortez Masto, D-Nev., (a newbie with a mere \$99,971).

And Sanders, Vermont's own, has taken \$2.39 million from PACs during his long career, a relative drop in the bucket given the amount of time he's been in office.

Sen. Patrick Leahy, who didn't sign the letter but has been in the Senate so long that some suspect he predates the creation of money, has taken just \$3.62 million from PACs during his more than 40 years in Washington.

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Those campaign finance numbers are available courtesy of the Center for Responsive Politics, which runs the website [OpenSecrets.org](http://OpenSecrets.org). The amounts are also just the tip of a very large iceberg when it comes to money in politics, and neither side has a corner on it.

The truth is, they're all slopping at the special-interest trough because they figure they have to in order to get re-elected.

Since the nation's campaign finance system requires members to spend obscene amounts of money (which the Supreme Court calls "speech") to get elected, they have to raise obscene amounts of money to have any hope of winning.

That money has to come from somewhere and, actually, it comes from pretty much everywhere.

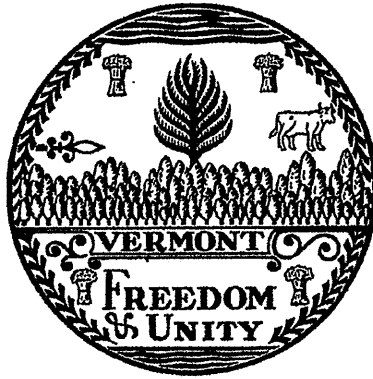
The pharmaceutical/health industry leads the way, having ponied up more than \$250 million to influence Congress in 2017 alone. (And we wonder why the country has an opioid crisis?) Then there are groups representing insurance, energy, electronics manufacturers, lawyers, and, well, you get the idea.

Even tiny Vermont is not immune. The last time Rep. Peter Welch had a competitive race for the state's lone seat in the U.S. House of Representatives, Welch and his Republican challenger both spent more than \$1 million.

House and Senate members want the public to believe that they're not influenced by the gobs of money thrown their way by special interests. Every vote, to hear them tell it, is pure as the driven snow, taken on its own merits and never influenced by campaign contributions.

That, of course, is a fiction, but one that Congress has the power to rewrite if members can kick their addiction to money.

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# Articles of Interest

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## Vermont



Senate President Pro Tempore Tim Ashe, D/P-Chittenden, center, joins other democratic legislative leaders to react to Gov. Phil Scott's budget address to the Legislature at the Statehouse in Montpelier on Tuesday. GLENN RUSSELL/FREE PRESS

## Education plan compared to an 'exotic mortgage'

Democratic lawmakers slam the late season proposal by Gov. Scott

April McCullum  
Burlington Free Press  
USA TODAY NETWORK

MONTPELIER - Gov. Phil Scott's plan to avoid a tax increase suffered a rough landing Wednesday when Democratic lawmakers slammed top officials for dropping a large, late-season proposal for the second year in a row.

"The word 'disrespectful' is very prominent in my vocabulary today," said Sen. Ann Cummings, chairwoman of the Senate Finance Committee, just after Scott's tax and budget chiefs sat down to pitch the plan.

Cummings complained that lawmakers have about six days to finish their work, and her committee can no longer make changes to the education tax bill.

"Now we're either going to rubber stamp, which you want, without due diligence, or we're going to be here for several more weeks," Cummings said. "And I'm losing money. I have a business to go

"That chart I got yesterday looks like an exotic mortgage explaining how a 20-year-old with a part-time job can afford a \$250,000 condo. It had a lot of pretty colors, but I want to know how you document the savings. I want to know where it is in reality."

Sen. Ann Cummings  
Chairwoman of the Senate Finance Committee

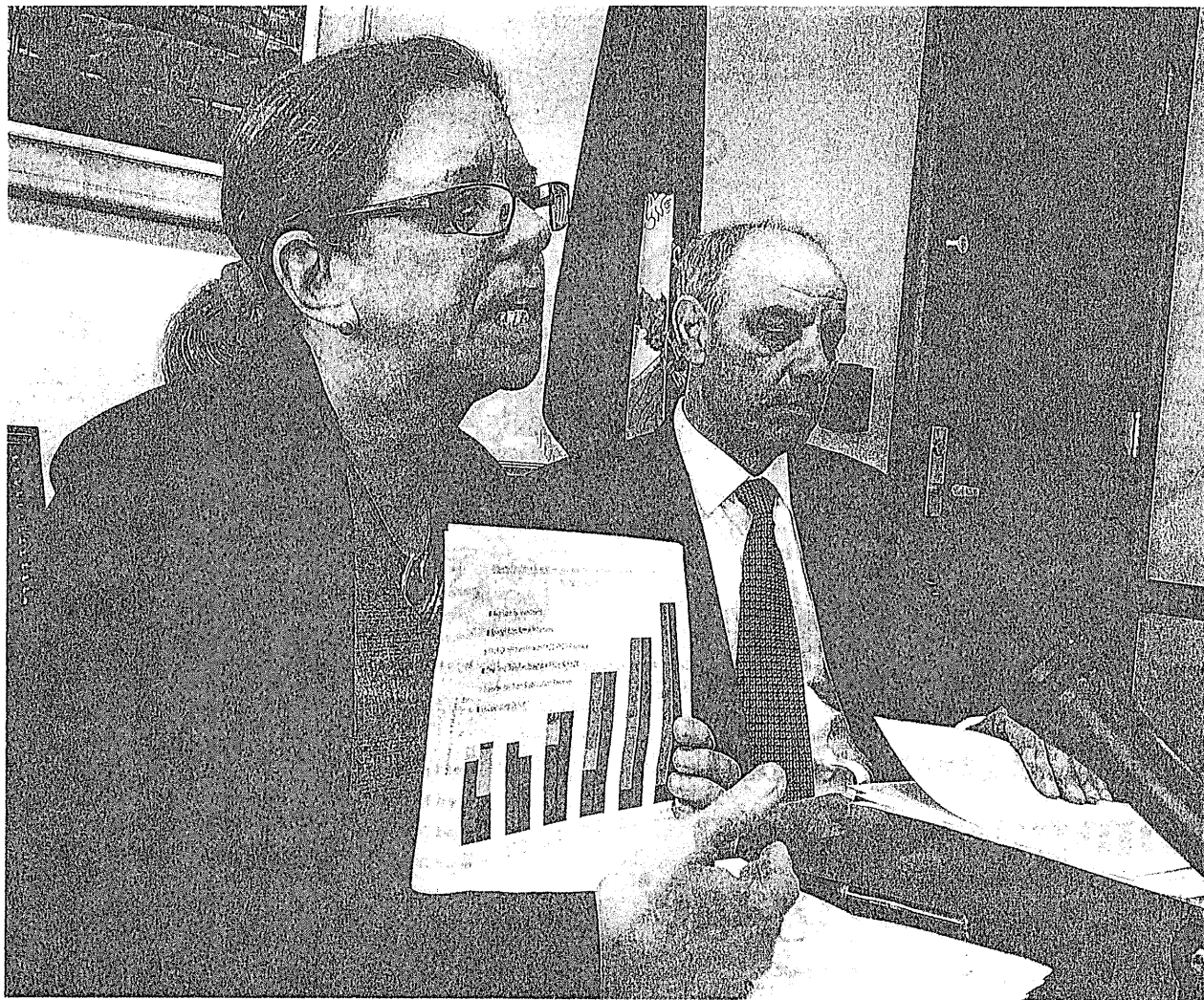
back to."

The administration has defended its timing by noting that some of the proposals were floated as part of a long "menu" of ideas in January.

"We were looking for some indication: tell us what's worth our while to put ef-

See EDUCATION, Page 4A

## Vermont



Vermont Administration Secretary Susanne Young explains Gov. Phil Scott's education finance plan at a news conference in Montpelier alongside Finance Commissioner Adam Greshin. APRIL MCCULLUM/FREE PRESS

## Education

Continued from Page 3A

forts into," Tax Commissioner Kaj Samsom said. "We did not receive that indication."

The proposal avoids an education property tax rate increase by finding \$58 million elsewhere in the budget, with large portions coming from a tobacco settlement, this year's anticipated revenue surplus, and state reserves.

The administration argues that the money would be recouped in future years through a package of complex cost-saving policies that have not been fully explained.

The proposal assumes that school districts would cut spending in response to a stricter tax penalty for per-pupil spending above the statewide average. It also

**"We were looking for some indication: tell us what's worth our while to put efforts into. We did not receive that indication."**

**Kaj Samsom**  
Tax Commissioner

expects that the school system will shed hundreds of jobs through natural attrition.

The Scott plan also plans on millions of dollars in future savings from an overhaul to special education funding – even though lawmakers who have worked on the special education issue this year have resisted banking on any savings.

Cummings pressed the Scott administration to show its math.

"That chart I got yesterday looks like an exotic mortgage explaining how a 20-

year-old with a part-time job can afford a \$250,000 condo," Cummings said. "It had a lot of pretty colors, but I want to know how you document the savings. I want to know where it is in reality."

"These are not imaginary savings. They're thought-out," replied Samsom, the tax commissioner.

As of Wednesday afternoon, the following pieces of Scott's plan lacked documentation:

■ A total savings of \$62 million over five years from reducing school staff po-

sitions. How many positions and what type of positions would be expected to be reduced?

■ A total savings of \$82 million over five years from changes to special education payments.

■ A total savings of \$11 million over five years from a proposed change to the income sensitivity program for new homeowners.

Jeff Francis, executive director of the Vermont Superintendents Association, said he hoped that lawmakers would thoroughly review the policy changes before speculating about money.

"If I were in charge of the process, I would want to prove the savings before I declared them," Francis said.

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### **CSJ clarifies its enrollment picture**

College of St. Joseph in Rutland clarified its enrollment situation Wednesday.

According to college spokesman James Lambert, the college approached the current academic year expecting 20 to 30 students fewer than what was needed to break even.

Then, Lambert said, when the year began 30 of the expected students did not show up, leaving the school with a deficit of 50 to 60 students.

College officials are looking for ways to keep the small school open in the face of declining enrollment and a dwindling endowment.

## Vermont

# Saliva testing bill blocked by VT Senate committee

Bill would have allowed police to screen for the presence of cannabis

April McCullum Burlington Free Press  
USA TODAY NETWORK

MONTPELIER — A bill that would let police use a roadside saliva test to detect marijuana and other drugs has been rejected by a key Senate committee.

The Senate Judiciary Committee rejected the bill Wednesday by a vote of 4-1. The House of Representatives endorsed the bill in March.

The bill would have authorized police to screen for the presence of cannabis and other substances using a saliva sample rather than a blood sample, which requires a warrant. Drivers who test positive on the roadside would be given another saliva test that could be used as evidence in court.

Unlike with alcohol, there would be no numerical threshold to determine marijuana-impaired driving, leading some opponents to argue that the test would be inherently unfair.

"You don't have a connection, a nexus between what the result of your test was and whether you were actually under the influence," said Sen. Joe Benning, R-Caledonia, a member of the

Senate Judiciary Committee who is also a criminal defense attorney.

Gov. Phil Scott's marijuana commission endorsed the proposal in January, and Scott's commissioner of public safety was a key supporter of the bill.

Benning is a member of the governor's marijuana commission but has consistently opposed the saliva testing proposal.

A group of law enforcement officials called the committee's decision "a loss for all Vermonters and inconsistent with a commitment to highway safety."

"This bill is an important part of the state's highway safety strategy, and its passage would ensure Vermont has a mechanism to effectively remove impaired drivers from our roadways and hold them accountable," Vermont Public Safety Commissioner Thomas Anderson, Vermont Association of Chiefs of Police President Jennifer Morrison and Vermont Sheriffs' Association President William Bohnyak said in a joint statement.

Vermonters will be legally allowed to grow, possess and consume small amounts of marijuana beginning July 1.

Contact April McCullum at 802-660-1863 or [amccullum@freepressmedia.com](mailto:amccullum@freepressmedia.com). Follow her on Twitter at [@April\\_McCullum](https://twitter.com/April_McCullum).



Vermont State Police trooper Jerry Partin demonstrates a saliva swab sample that can be tested for the presence of marijuana. GLENN RUSSELL/FREE PRESS FILE

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**Rep. Welch celebrates Montpelier affordable housing project** SA

MONTPELIER - Vermont leaders gathered this week in Montpelier to celebrate the groundbreaking of an affordable housing project in the capital city's French Block.

The Times Argus reports Democratic U.S. Rep. Peter Welch was joined Tuesday by Mayor Anne Watson and representatives from nonprofit organizations.

The \$6.1 million affordable housing complex will house 18 units. Leahy says the project will help families looking for stability.

Leahy also announced that the state will receive over \$16 million in funds from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development and the nonprofit NeighborWorks America. The package includes grants for community development and affordable housing.

Construction on the French Block project is expected to be finished in December.

*Associated Press*

# Scott takes heat during local visit

## Governor facing gun rights protesters statewide

By KEVIN O'CONNOR  
*Reformer correspondent*

BRATTLEBORO — When Gov. Phil Scott awoke at his home near Montpelier on Monday to an unwelcome spring blanket of snow, he figured a scheduled trip south to Brattleboro would bring a warmer climate.

Then he arrived to a pair of protesters standing in his reserved parking space.

"My guns are innocent," read one of their signs.

"The right of the people to keep and bear arms shall not be infringed," read the other.

Scott, accompanied by an aide and state trooper, listened as the

demonstrators, upset with his April 11 approval of several gun-control laws, asked if he was considering repealing his support.

"No, no, I'm not," he said before walking away.

So goes the governor's new normal. Last year, during his first appearance at the Brattleboro Area Chamber of Commerce's annual Governor's lunch, Scott talked business. This year, with more than 100 attendees having eyed the protesters, he ditched any routine remarks and addressed the issue head-on.

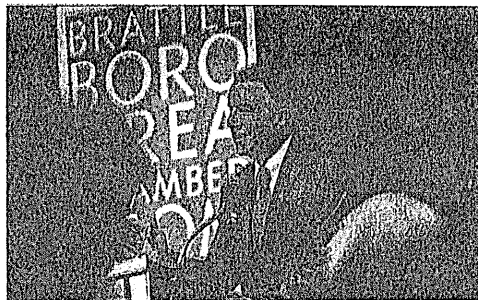
"Discussions around these measures have been difficult, emotional and complex," Scott told the

crowd. "I know I may lose some support, but the alternative was to do nothing. If we don't try to reduce the possibility of a tragedy, if we don't try to prevent another death, in my mind, we would have failed Vermonters."

Inside, Scott received a round of applause. Outside, demonstrators said they were only starting to make noise.

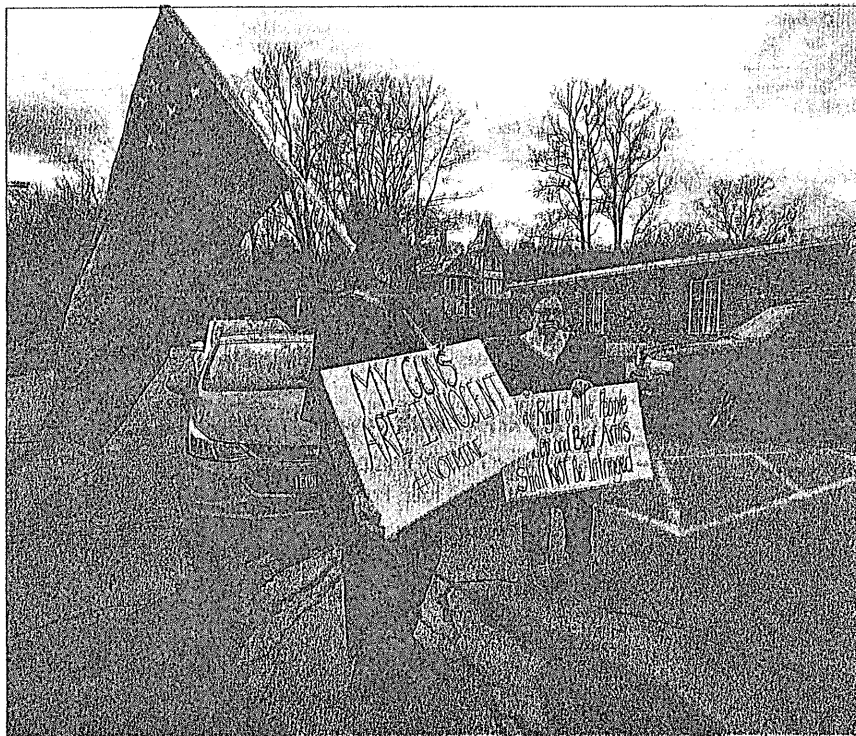
Jim and Annette Hazell said they drove a half-hour from Searsburg to protest, just as they did when they traveled to Montpelier to watch the governor sign the gun-control legislation.

SCOTT, Page 4



PHOTOS BY KRISTOPHER RADDER — BRATTLEBORO REFORMER

Vermont Gov. Phil Scott talks to a large audience at the annual Brattleboro Chamber of Commerce luncheon Monday at the American Legion, in Brattleboro.



Jim and Annette Hazell of Searsburg hold up signs in their support for the Second Amendment as they wait for Vermont Gov. Phil Scott to ask him a question outside of the American Legion, in Brattleboro on Monday.

## Scott

FROM PAGE 1

"There I screamed out, 'You're a traitor,'" Jim Hazell said. "I've never had a problem owning a gun and now he says we have a problem?"

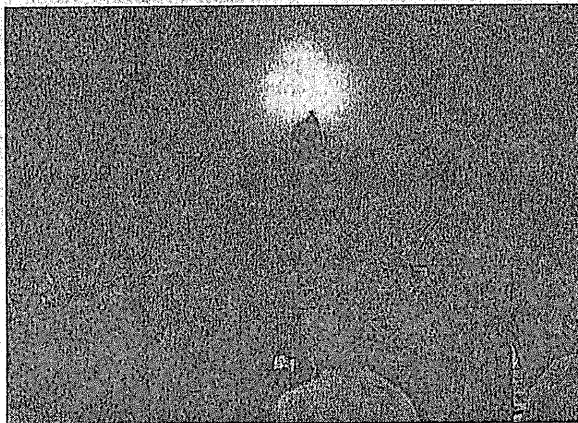
The governor said he wasn't surprised by the demonstrators, who are popping up statewide.

"It was a little more intense up in Newport," he said.

With a state trooper by his side, Scott said he was responding by educating people about what he actually approved. The governor said although one law raises the age at which someone can buy a firearm from 18 to 21, it only pertains to people who aren't in the military or law enforcement or haven't taken a hunter safety course.

"People also think we're coming to take their gun or magazine," he continued. "There's nobody coming to take anything."

In response, protesters said their biggest complaint



KRISTOPHER RADDER — BRATTLEBORO REFORMER

**David Twombly asks Vermont Governor Phil Scott a question about the state's Act 46 school consolidation law during the annual Brattleboro Chamber of Commerce luncheon at the American Legion, in Brattleboro, on Monday.**

wasn't about anything specific but the fact Scott signed a bill at all.

"He swore he would not enact any new gun laws," Jim Hazell said, "and then he went back on his word."

The governor said his shift came this winter after the shooting deaths of 17 students and educators in Parkland, Florida, and

subsequent arrest of an 18-year-old Vermonter on charges he was planning a similar event at Fair Haven Union High School.

"I've hunted and fished my entire life and I never felt the need to change our gun laws," Scott told the crowd. "I figured since we were such a small, tightknit state, we were somehow in-

sulated from violence."

Scott hoped his change of heart would inspire legislators to do the same and approve a "forthcoming policy package" to reduce school spending, noting the state's per-pupil costs were double the national average.

"As much as we complain about health care, education is the single largest expenditure in state government," he said. "The reality is we have an incredibly inefficient K-12 system."

The governor also encouraged people to hear each other out.

"We've reached a dangerous tipping point where many on both sides have given up on listening," he said. "Our national dialogue has been reduced to angry social media posts where facts no longer seem to matter. We're being challenged to do the right thing. We can disagree, but we can do so respectfully and civilly."

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